

2020 resolution: family meals that work for everyone.



Does your typical dinnertime involve takeout, screens, and/or family members passing like ships in the night on the way to and from activities? The struggle is real: Family dinners have declined by more than 30% in the last three decades, mainly due to busy schedules. Yet most of us want to eat more meals together. The reasons are clear:

We know that children who eat family meals have better eating habits and are less likely to be overweight. And besides supporting good nutrition, family meals are a time to connect and support each other, which translates to better mental health. (Teenagers who regularly have family dinners get better grades and have lower rates of depression and substance abuse and are less likely to smoke than those who don't have regular family dinners.) Pave the way for more table time by grabbing your calendars and planning. Here are a few things to keep in mind:

Be realistic. If you can carve out time for two or three more meals together—or even one—you'll be on your way. Breakfast and lunch count, too—not just dinner.

Keep the food simple and low-stress. There's no need for elaborate meals. Slow cookers can help save time, and batch cooking (i.e., abundant leftovers) is a great idea, too

Put 'em to work! Encourage children to participate in meal prep, cooking, setting the table, and cleanup.

No food fights. Try to make sure there's something on the table that most people will like. But don't nag your kids to eat more vegetables or try the scallops.

Banish screens. That goes for the adults at the table, too!

Set the tone. If you're not used to eating together, it might feel awkward at first. Start a meaningful conversation by asking everyone to share the best part of the day, a funny story, something they're thankful for, or something they learned recently.

